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**BETWEEN OPEN ADVENTURE IN FOREIGN LANDS AND CONFINED
LIVING IN PORTUGAL: PORTUGUESE CHILDREN'S LITERATURE AND THE
WORK OF VIRGÍNIA DE CASTRO E ALMEIDA**

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Abstract

One of the main tendencies of Portuguese Children's Literature seems to be the fictionalization of a persistent oscillation between the propensity for travelling and for knowing other cultures and a kind of confinement to the native space. In the first four decades of the 20th century, which coincided with a period of decisive political changes in Portugal, some relevant authors wrote stories about travel and adventure. Others were more interested in patriotic or nationalistic themes, as a response to the ideals of Salazar's dictatorial government. On this specific subject, the case of Virgínia de Castro e Almeida (1874-1945), a prolific Portuguese writer, is paradigmatic. In fact, besides the publication of *Céu Aberto* (1907), *Em Pleno Azul* (1907), *História de Dona Redonda e da sua Gente* (1942) and *Aventuras de Dona Redonda* (1943), four important and innovative novels dedicated to juvenile readers, which direct or indirectly reflect her sympathy for other cultures and/or foreign lands, she was also the author of some titles published in the historical series "Grandes Portugueses", namely *Dom Fuas Roupinho*, *Fernão Lopes*, *Dom Gualdim e Gil Vicente*, and «Pátria», for example *História da Rainha Santa e do Rei Lavrador* and *História de uma grande batalha de Aljubarrota e da Padeira que matou sete espanhóis*. This paper will reflect upon the mentioned theme(s) by cross-reading these texts of Virgínia de Castro e Almeida, and some selected others published by different authors in the same period.

Key words: Portuguese literature for children and young adults, Virgínia de Castro e Almeida,

Resumen

Una de las principales tendencias en la literatura infantil portuguesa parece ser la ficcionalización de una persistente oscilación entre la propensión a viajar y conocer otras culturas y un cierto confinamiento en el propio lugar de origen. En las primeras cuatro décadas del siglo XX, época que coincide con cambios políticos decisivos en la historia de Portugal, algunos autores

relevantes escribieron historias sobre viajes y aventuras. Otros en cambio estaban más interesados en temas patrióticos o nacionales como respuesta a los ideales del gobierno dictatorial de Salazar. El caso de Virginia de Castro e Almeida (1874-1945), una prolífica escritora portuguesa, es ciertamente paradigmático. De hecho, además de la publicación de *Céu Aberto* (1907), *Em Pleno Azul* (1907), *História de Dona Redonda e da sua Gente* (1942) y *Aventuras de Dona Redonda* (1943), cuatro importantes y novedosas novelas dedicadas a lectores juveniles y que reflejan directa o indirectamente su simpatía por otras culturas o países lejanos, también es autora de algunos títulos publicados en la serie histórica “Grandes Portugueses”, como *Dom Fuas Roupinho*, *Fernão Lopes*, *Dom Gualdim* e *Gil Vicente*, y «Pátria», por ejemplo *História da Rainha Santa e do Rei Lavrador* e *História de uma grande batalha de Aljubarrota e da Padeira que matou sete espanhóis*. Este estudio tratará los temas mencionados realizando una lectura comparativa de los textos de Virginia de Castro y Almeida y otros textos seleccionados de autores de la misma época.

Palabras Clave:

1. Introduction

With over twenty titles which include children’s books, criticism (often of a pedagogical and doctrinaire nature), travelogues, novels and film scripts, Virgínia de Castro Almeida (VCA) (1874-1945) was, according to some critics, an author of the golden age of children’s literature (Gomes, 1997: 22), and together with other Portuguese writers¹, a literary figure driven by political ideals that coincided with those of the Republican Revolution. The concepts of “Progress, Work, Education, Freedom and Country”, as Esther de Lemos put it, have a strong presence in her writing for children and young adults, and has determined the inscription of her work within the dominion of “literature with an agenda” (*idem, ibidem*: 21). This label is not completely unfounded, as VCA always demonstrated a particular interest in education themes, which is visible, for instance in books of hers such as *How I should run my home [Como devo governar a minha casa]* (1906) and *How we should raise and educate our children [Como devemos criar e educar os nossos filhos]* (1908), and, much later, in the task of editing and writing the brochures for the collections “Fatherland” [“Pátria”] (43 volumes) e “Great Portuguese Men” [“Grandes Portugueses”] (the first four volumes in this collection).

Her debut novella, *The Tempting Fairy [A Fada Tentadora]*², was written in 1895 under the pseudonym Gi, and had a preface by Maria Amália Vaz de Carvalho (1847-1921). Still

¹ For example, Ana de Castro Osório (1872-1935), who, following one of the most fertile creative lines of her time – “to show countries, peoples and distant regions, in an attempt to open up to the world (fighting against the isolation of Portugal was a concern of the elites)” (Gomes, 2005: 74), wrote *Felicia and Felix’s Adventurous Voyages at the North Pole [Viagens Aventurosas de Felícia e Felizardo no Pólo Norte]* (1922) and *Felicia and Felix’s Adventurous Voyages in Brazil [Viagens Aventurosas de Felícia e Felizardo no Brasil]* (1927), two books approved and recommended to be taught at schools.

² António Garcia Barreto says of this novella that: “It is a work with open moral and edifying pretensions, a type of language that is at times naïve, and often quite different from that of a twelve year-old. The general idea is that the poor can end up rich through work, dedication and honour, and that some rich, such as the Baron in the story, may very well lose their fortune” (Barreto, 2002: 191).

writing as Gi, VCA published *Stories: a book for children* [*Histórias: livro para crianças*] in 1898. *Blessed* and *Blessed Capital* [*Bendita e Capital Bendito*] followed in 1907 and 1910, respectively, two novels that deal with “notions of corporativism, the cult of Work and Progress” (Pires, 1983: 96), a preoccupation with patriotic education, a subject which, in a very different register, and at the service of Salazar’s dictatorship, she took up again later in her historical narratives for the collection “Fatherland”.

2. *Open Skies* and *In Full Blue* [*Céu Aberto* and *Em Pleno Azul*]: education and living with the Other

From 1907 onwards, VCA edited the collection “A library for my children”, and in the same year, she published two novellas for young adults that are still in print in Portugal: *Céu Aberto* [Open Skies] and *Em Pleno Azul* [In Full Blue].

As was noted by Francesca Blockeel (2001: 41), in this diptych, there is a strong presence of educational and pedagogical preoccupations, which are informed by a progressive vision. These concerns are visible, for instance, in multiple references of scientific, historical and cultural nature, in a deliberate attempt at broadening the knowledge of younger characters, and by implication of the potential readers of those texts.

Open Skies tells of a journey by boat to Italy of a bourgeois family – a couple, an adult cousin and three children (two siblings and their cousin). The various dialogues between the adults (Maria, Dinis and Cousin Jeremias) and the children (Rita, Rodrigo and João) revolve around themes like the compass, episodes of Portuguese history, Michelangelo’s *Moses*, Gibraltar, Mount Vesuvius, and sea creatures like Portuguese Man o’Wars and electric fish. A predominant feature of this novella is a constant euphoria, namely when historical and cultural themes are discussed, which at times sounds a bit too artificial if we take into account the young age of the children. An imperturbable family harmony³, a certain cosmopolitanism, the references, both implicit and explicit, to the importance of education, of knowing the world and other countries, for example, through travel (regarded as a form of education), and the idea that only sacrifice and serious study – for men and women⁴ – can grant stability and future happiness are features of this book. But along with this openness to the Other, there is an uncomfortable patriotism (or a praise of the national) carried out in a subtle way in references to folk traditions and the feats of the Great Voyages, as well as embarrassing expressions of racism, particularly in its reference to African peoples.

In Full Blue catches up with the characters and themes dealt with in *Open Skies*, who are now going to school in Switzerland. This allows the author to demonstrate the results of the educational programme she argued for in the previous book, each character turning out to be and to act according to the education they received when they were younger.

³ *Open Skies* [*Céu Aberto*] depicts an extended version of the family.

⁴ The valorization of women, the fight for equality with men, and their right to education were also seminal in VCA’s writing and life story.

Both in *Open Skies* and in *In Full Blue*, the swiftness and narrative fluidity that are largely a product of the predominance of dialogue⁵ play an important part in captivating the readers' attention. On this subject, it is interesting to note that VCA doesn't follow a more conventional pattern of including characters' speech in the text by using a speech verb and punctuation like a colon, inverted commas or a dash. Instead, the signaling of direct speech is done in a way that resembles that of dramatic texts.

Open Skies and *In Full Blue* have become classics of Portuguese children's literature, and Esther de Lemos has written about them that:

“as they were clear windows on the world and its variety, on science, art, nature, the human soul, these books served the ideals of that time better than any type of propaganda. They invited the Portuguese people to progress, work, search, keeping their personality and the love for their land at the same time that they learnt from abroad on so many aspects of life and culture” (Lemos, 1972: 23).

3. *The Story of Mrs Round and her People* and *The Adventures of Mrs Round*: an aesthetic turn

Humour, a certain feeling of unsettlement and an unusual irreverence according to the standards of the time are the dominant notes of *The Story of Mrs Round and her People* [*História de Dona Redonda e sua gente*] (1942) and *The Adventures of Mrs Round* [*Aventuras de Dona Redonda*] (1943). Published nearly thirty years after the first diptych⁶, these books have been said by Sofia de Santo Tirso (?),⁷ Augusto de Santa Rita (1888-1956)⁸ e Olavo d' Eça Leal (1908-1976)⁹ to exhibit a similar style to other literary works of their epoch, and also to the style of contemporary Portuguese authors like Manuel António Pina (1943-)¹⁰, for example.

These two books are a turning point in the work of VCA, who openly declared in the preface¹¹ to *The Story of Mrs Round and her People* her wish to update the style and themes of her writing for children, acknowledging the influence that Lewis Carroll's work had in this approach to her work. It may have been this change in paradigm that justified the Spanish editions¹² of the Mrs Round books.

The characters in these books are two antithetical women, Mrs Round (Portuguese, robust, round and extroverted) and Mrs Crazy (English, thin and reserved), and an ostensibly

⁵ José António Gomes thinks the style of VCA is influenced by the Comtesse de Ségur (Gomes, 2005).

⁶ These two books are part of the collection “The best books for children” [«Os melhores livros para crianças»] by Clássica Editora.

⁷ Author of *The Pink Doll* [*A Boneca Cor-de-Rosa*] (1910), with a preface by Maria Amália Vaz de Carvalho. The biography of Maria Sofia (Sophia) de Santo Tirso (Thyrso), specially her birthday, is unknown.

⁸ Author of, among other works, *The World of My Pretty Ones* [*O Mundo dos Meus Bonitos*] (1920).

⁹ Author of *The Extraordinary Story of Iratan and Iracema, the World's Rudest Children* [*História Extraordinária de Iratan e Iracema, os Meninos mais Malcriados do Mundo*] (1939).

¹⁰ Author of, among other works, *Giarfs & Dwants* [*Gigões & Anantes*] (1974) and *Mr. Invention* [*O Inventão*] (1987).

¹¹ Further research into the work of VCA would include the study of paratexts, which would contribute towards a reading of her work in terms of chronologic development.

¹² There are at least two deluxe editions of these books published by Editorial Yunque, in Barcelona.

multicultural group of children¹³: Chico (a Portuguese boy), Dick (an English boy), Franz (a German boy) and Zipriti (a mulatto girl).

Generally speaking, the feel of *The Adventures of Mrs Round and her People* “is reminiscent of the *nonsense* that is so common to English books” (Rocha, 2001: 56) and, according to Natércia Rocha, possesses “a type of humour and fantasy that take us back to the extraordinary work of Monteiro Lobato” (*idem, ibidem*: 63).

However, if the fantastic singles out and structures the diegesis of the book, it is also a device for disguising the support for ideals associated to Salazar’s dictatorship. As Manuel Teixeira Araújo (2008) has noted, one can read from certain passages of this book a critique of sentimentalism, as well as an apology for the family, the Catholic church and the glorification of certain heroic figures of Portuguese history (such as D. Afonso Henriques and Infante D. Henrique).

4. The collections “Fatherland” and “Great Portuguese”: “your fatherland is the most beautiful of all fatherlands”¹⁴

The publication, by the Portuguese National Propaganda Office, of over forty volumes in the collection “Fatherland”¹⁵ started in 1936, with the booklet *Story of King Afonso and Zaida the Moor*; the last title in this series came out in 1944. The collection consists of a series of historical fiction narratives¹⁶, a product of the author’s strong adherence to the ideals of the dictatorship (Gomes, 1997: 32) that “turned out to be an important instrument of propaganda” (*idem, ibidem*: 32) for Salazar’s regime.

A certain informality in the opening of the narrative, and the colloquial language that is close to oral speech that is to be found in the first volume of the collection (*História do Rei Afonso e da Moira Zaida*)¹⁷ are a distinguishing feature of the whole series. The preoccupation with historical truth materialised in the chronological data coexists with a register that, by the profusion of adjectives, imagery, enumerations, for example, of actions are, by definition, subjective, exposing the flattering intentions of VCA¹⁸. This same intention is visible in the

¹³ Intercultural dialogue was already a strong characteristic of *Open Skies* [*Céu Aberto*] and *In Full Blue* [*Em Pleno Azul*].

¹⁴ The complete sentence goes “Your fatherland is the most beautiful of all fatherlands: it deserves all your sacrifices” [“A tua Pátria é a mais linda de todas as Pátrias: merece todos os teus sacrifícios”]. This was a sentence that could be read in 4th grade schoolbooks during the period of the dictatorship, and is evoked by Ribeiro (1994).

¹⁵ The 1943 edition of *The Adventures of Mrs Round* [*Aventuras de Dona Redonda*] includes a section of “Works by Virgínia de Castro e Almeida”. Here one can read “Ed. Secretariado da Propaganda Nacional – *Colecção Pátria*. Series of 43 historical stories for the people. Booklets of sixteen to eighteen pages, illustrated with colour engravings by Pamela Boden (Pam).”

¹⁶ The books that have been read during the preparation of this article are in the bibliography section.

¹⁷ Cf. “What I am about to tell you is the History of a prince who was the grandfather of the first king of Portugal. And this happened about nine hundred years ago” [“O que eu vou contar é a História de um príncipe que foi o avô do primeiro rei de Portugal. E isto passou-se há uns novecentos anos”] (Almeida, 1936: 3).

¹⁸ Cf. “Here are Leon and Castilla; and after a great battle Afonso was defeated. His troops were dizimated, his kingdom invaded, they killed and burnt as much as they could; and Afonso saved his life by escaping on horseback for those fields” [“Encontraram-se entre Leão e Castela; e depois de uma grande batalha Afonso foi vencido. Desbarataram-lhe as tropas, invadiram-lhe o reino, mataram, queimaram e arrasaram o mais que puderam; e Afonso escapou da morte fugindo a mata-cavalos por aquêles [sic] campos fora...”] (Almeida, 1936: 3).

semantic and pragmatic implications of the adjectives used in several titles of the collection.¹⁹ The tone of legend-telling that is used in the description of some episodes, along with the sense of fatality and theatricality with which love and other moods are evoked and exacerbated²⁰, are in keeping with the genre of historical fiction, and here, these aspects take on a doctrinaire and apologetic function. Thus, the nature of these texts coincides with the *Instructions for Children's Literature* put out, years later, in 1950, by the Censorship Office:

“It should be kept in mind that, without turning the history of Portugal into a perpetual apology, it is possible, in stories for children, without betraying the truth, to approach it with a sympathetic spirit, seeking in it what brings the Portuguese people together rather than what divides them, and in this we are particularly fortunate for it is easy to find edifying episodes [in our history]” (1950: 4).

Subjects like the praise of virtue and sensibility²¹, sacrifice, suffering, courage, abnegation, generosity, religion, rewarding for the good and punishment for the wicked, and the power of love²² are common to the titles in this series.

¹⁹ Cf. *Story of the Great Fuas Roupinho and other wonders* [*História do Grande Fuas Roupinho e outras maravilhas*], *The Beautiful Story of a family in the time of Queen Maria I* [*A Linda História de uma família no tempo de Dona Maria I*], *The marvellous story of how the great emperor Napoleon I was defeated in Portugal* [*História maravilhosa de como o grande imperador Napoleão I foi vencido em Portugal*]. Note how the adjectives in the last title don't just engrandise Napoleon, but also, by implication, stress the strength and the courage of the Portuguese.

²⁰ Cf. “Shortly after, he died. / Weeping and screaming, Zaida lay on the body of the one she had loved so much. And when her maids tried to lift her up, they saw she had also died. / Thus the strong bonds of that faithful love remained unbroken by death. / King Afonso and the beautiful Zaida died together, and together they were buried. And no one should pity them, for if they suffered and fought a lot, they also received from life all the greatest blessings they could get. / And Afonso IV of Castilla, Leon and Galicia was the first Christian king who beat the Moors and conquered half of Spain back from them.” [“E pouco depois, morreu. / Lavada em pranto e soltando um grande grito, Zaida atirou-se sobre [sic] o corpo daquele que em vida amara tanto. E quando as aias foram para a levantar viram que se finara também. / Assim os laços tão fortes daquele amor fiel nem pela morte foram quebrados. / Juntos morreram o rei Afonso e a linda Zaida, e juntos foram sepultados. E ninguém tenha dó deles, pois se muito padeceram e lutaram, também pela sua força de ânimo, receberam da vida os maiores bens que ela pode dar. / E Afonso VI de Castela, Leão e Galiza, foi o primeiro rei cristão que, vencendo os mouros, conseguiu reconquistar-lhes mais de metade das Espanhas.”] (Almeida, 1936: 13).

²¹ Cf. “Portugal owes a great deal to Queen Maria I. She was an educated lady with a good intellect and a kind heart. She managed to surround herself with great honest men, who would do everything for the good of the country. She created the Royal Academy of Science, to which the sciences and humanities in Portugal owe a lot. Education in Portugal also owes a lot to this good queen. Work was done with enthusiasm and faith. / One of the great men chosen by the queen who helped her the most in her work was Pina Manique, police intendant. This man worked tirelessly and lovingly for the good of the country. He knew what he wanted and he possessed a strong austere will and a kind heart (...) the Marques de Pombal had left everything in a big mess. He did many things that brought him fame but as he had no heart, everything he did was hollow and cold; trees that bore no fruit or poisoned fruit. / the good intendant Pina Manique worked with his heart. He cared more about his people than he cared about fame” [“A terra de Portugal deve muito à Rainha Dona Maria I. Era uma senhora muito instruída, de muito boa cabeça e de grande coração. Soube rodear-se de homens honestos e de alto valor, que tudo faziam pelo bem do país. Foi ela quem criou a Academia Real das Ciências à qual a ciência e as letras portuguesas muito deveram. Também muito deve a esta boa rainha a instrução em Portugal. Trabalhava-se com entusiasmo e com fé. / Um dos grandes homens escolhidos pela rainha e que mais a ajudou na sua obra, foi Pina Manique, intendente da policia. Este homem trabalhou sem descanso e com amor para o bem de Portugal. Sabia o que queria e tinha uma vontade austera e forte e um grande coração. (...) O marquês de Pombal deixara tudo em grande confusão. Fez muitas coisas que lhe deram fama, mas como não tinha coração, tudo que fazia era seco e frio; árvores que poucos ou nenhuns frutos bons vieram a dar, e algumas só deram frutos envenenados. / o bom intendente Pina Manique, esse trabalhava com o seu coração. Cuidava mais do bem do povo do que de criar fama.”] (Almeida, 1944: 7).

²² Cf. “Henrique got better from his wounds and fever and went back to being beautiful and strong as before. His best remedy was the joy of seeing his beloved once again” [“Henrique curou-se das suas feridas e febres e tornou-se outra vez lindo e forte como dantes. O seu melhor ungento foi a alegria de tornar a ver o seu querido amor.”] (Almeida, 1937: 15).

Furthermore, nationalism, a seminal aspect of the propaganda of the dictatorship which shapes the collection, is materialised in the attempt to perpetuate certain collective memories²³ and in the praise of past deeds²⁴, which transpires both in the very title of each booklet and in their content, as nearly all of them are centred on a historical character and the glorification of his/her acts²⁵. It is not surprising then that the author resorts to discursive strategies that aim at exultation²⁶, and that she openly criticised Oliveira Martins and his type of historical perspective.²⁷

As is to be expected from this type of text to a certain extent, prejudice, intolerance and xenophobia²⁸ are present in a most unsettling way, and so is the defense of colonialism²⁹.

²³ Such as the maritime adventures, always told in an enthusiastic way. See, for instance, *Story of the Great Seaman that the sea charmed* [*História do Grande Marinheiro que o mar enfeitiçou*].

²⁴ Cf. “The Portuguese have to keep these names in their minds and in their hearts. Much precious blood was spilt there, your gransparents’ blood for the glory of your Fatherland, the service of the king, the defence of the Christian faith; many martyres died there for the love of our land, and many heroes were made there, in a rude and strict school of Portuguese captains and soldiers whose fame, during the Discoveries and the wars in the East, filled the world with awe. (...) And in those great works one can say that the stones were cemented with our blood and raised with the strength of our hearts.” [“É preciso que os portugueses de agora fixem bem na memória e no coração estes nomes. Ali correu muito sangue precioso dos nosso avós para glória da Pátria, para serviço do rei, para defesa da santa fé de Cristo; ali morreram muitos mártires por amor da nossa terra e se formaram muitos heróis numa rude e áspera escola de capitães e soldados portugueses cuja fama, depois, nas descobertas e guerras do Oriente, encheram o mundo de espanto. (...) E nessas grandes obras pode-se dizer que as pedras foram cimentadas com o nosso sangue e erguidas com a força dos nossos corações. (Almeida, 1942: 5)».

²⁵ Cf. “This was a great day for our land because the Master, who became king João I was one of the best kings we’ve ever had, and the first of the House of Aviz, so glorious, that it turned the Portuguese nation into one of the most famous, rich and powerful countries in the world in that time. And this happened in 1385, i.e., about five hundred years ago. / Now Portugal had a king, praised be the Lord! And what a king!” [“Este foi um grande dia para a nossa terra porque o Mestre, que ficou sendo el-rei D. João I de Portugal, foi um dos melhores reis que tivemos, e o primeiro da dinastia de Aviz, tão gloriosa, que tornou a nação portuguesa numa das mais afamadas, ricas e poderosas do mundo naqueles tempos. E isto foi no ano de 1385, quere dizer, vai em quinhentos e tantos anos. / Agora já Portugal tinha um rei, louvado Deus! E que rei!”] (Almeida, 1939: 4).

²⁶ “Back then there was in Portugal a king so determined and so wise that he was called Perfect Prince. He was King João II, the son of King Afonso V, the African” [“Naquele tempo havia em Portugal um rei tão forte de pensar, tão firme de vontade e tão cheio de saber e de juízo, que lhe puseram o nome de Príncipe Perfeito. Era Dom João II, filho de el-rei Dom Afonso V a quem chamaram o Africano (...).”] (Almeida, 1941: 3).

²⁷ Cf. “On November 28th the royal family embarked. A Portuguese artist, Oliveira Martins, who used many beautiful words to write a bad and ugly history of Portugal, told this event as something shameful. God forgive him his lies! The departure of the royal family for Brazil was carried out with such dignity and quietness that everybody there had tears in their eyes” [“No dia 28 de Novembro embarcou a família real. Um artista português, Oliveira Martins, que escreveu com muito lindas palavras uma feia e má história de Portugal, contou esse embarque da família real como coisa vergonhosa. Deus lhe perdoe as mentiras que escreveu! A partida da família real para a terra portuguesa do Brasil fez-se com tanta dignidade e sossego que não havia naquele cais de Belém quem não tivesse lágrimas nos olhos.”] (Almeida, 1945: 7)»

²⁸ Cf. “And he was right to be admired for the cross is the sign of the Christians and in all those places in Africa no one had be found except for Moors and people with weird religions, who adored idols and spells, as barbarians that they were” [“E tinha razão de se admirar porque a cruz é o sinal dos cristãos e por todas aquelas terras de África não tinham sido encontrados senão moiros infieis ou gentios, quere dizer, gente que tinha religiões esquisitas de ídolos e feitiços, como bárbaros que eram.”] (Almeida, 1941: 3)».

²⁹ Cf. “Thus in a sad way the Portuguese conquest of Tangier ended. But the Moors didn’t enjoy the victory for long; nor did the martyrdom they put the Santo Infante Dom Fernando through, as will be told. Thirty some years later the Portuguese took Tangier and the Moors had their punishment; Portugal kept that North African city, and others, for about two hundred years, and they never fell back into the hands of the infidels.” [“Assim triste acabou desta vez a empresa portuguesa da conquista de Tânger. Mas o moiros não gozaram muito tempo da vitória que tão caro lhes custou; nem ficou sem castigo o martírio que fizeram passar ao Santo infante Dom Fernando, como será contado. Trinta e tantos anos depois os portugueses tomaram Tânger e os moiros tiveram seu castigo; perto de duzentos anos conservou Portugal a posse daquela cidade e de muitas outras no norte de África, que nunca mais voltaram a mãos de infieis.» (Almeida, 1940: 13).

From a macro-structural point of view, there was an authorial (and maybe editorial) preoccupation in establishing connections between different volumes in the collection, not only through references to further booklets within the texts, but also by announcing the next titles in the series at the end of each work.³⁰

A brief reference should be made to the graphic design of these booklets, for despite the fact that they seem to fit in with the aesthetic tendencies of their time, it cannot be said that they are appealing. In fact, the tiny print makes reading difficult, especially for younger readers, and the complete absence of illustrations can also put off potential readers.

In 1943, the collection “Great Portuguese Men”, also published by the Portuguese National Propaganda Office, began with the publication of *Dom Fuas Roupinho*, also by VCA, to which *Fernão Lopes* (1944), *Dom Gualdim Pais* (1944) and *Gil Vicente* (1945) followed. When VCA died (1945), J. Estêvão Pinto (1895-?³¹) took up the writing of the following books in the collection.

Written with very similar purposes as those of the “Fatherland” series, the four books by VCA follow the pedagogical function she thought literature should have, and reinforce Salazar’s ideological agenda: respect for authority, valorisation of the nation, the mythologizing of national heroes, Christian devotion, divine inspiration, obedience, etc. The first book in this series is explicit about the ideological positioning of VCA and the intentions of that work: “With the story of Dom Fuas Roupinho we have initiated a collection called “Great Portuguese Men”. Well, the history of Portugal, which is the most beautiful history out of all histories, is made of nothing but wonders, miracles and carried out by great men, geniuses in war, science, the high ranks of ruling and be ruled, the wisdom of governing, the desire to discover, the power to create and the rare and splendid capacity to adore. But we are no historiographers; we are story-tellers (...) We are story-tellers; and we’re going to tell our stories to the boys and girls of the “Mocidade Portuguesa” [a compulsory organization for children between the age of seven and fourteen, where discipline and nationalist ideals were hammered into them] who are at school and probably know more than we do about the official facts of our past.” (Almeida, 1943: 6).

The apology of the national past and the hyper valorisation of the nation are also visible in the introduction to the booklet dedicated to Dom Gualdim:

“Today, when families or groups take their holiday to travel around the country, maybe it will occur to few of them what that land was like eight hundred years ago, in the dawn of our nationality. They admire the fertile fields peopled with picturesque villages and farms properly looked after, the workers who plough and plant the earth and peacefully collect fruit, the railway line and good roads, the cities and towns with their progressive improving: plumbing, electricity, good ruling and policing, schools, hospitals, asylums, public gardens, factories, all those facilities, security and riches whose extraordinary development over the last few years have been turning Portugal into a model of good governance that is respected in the world. (...) to thank God for the *our daily bread*” (Almeida, 1944: 5). The book about Gil Vicente also opens with a similar introduction.³²

³⁰ At the end of vol. 17, it is announced that the next volume will be *History of the Passion and Death of the Infante Santo Dom Fernando* [*História da Paixão e Morte do Infante Santo Dom Fernando*].

³¹ We didn’t find this date (corresponding to the day this writer has died).

³² Cf. “Many people, especially in Portugal, mistake culture for instruction” (Almeida, 1945: 5).

The examples under scrutiny here show how the “Great Portuguese Men” collection, under the guise of Historical account, served the pedagogical and doctrinaire agenda of the political regime of the time.

Conclusion

As António Garcia Barreto stresses, the extensive work of VCA (1895-1945) was written over three regimes: a Monarchy, a Republic and a Dictatorship, and it understandably mirrored those different political and social contexts, thus becoming an important example of the evolution of literature for children and young adults in Portugal.

VCA’s literary, and even biographical, route, the change in her literary vision and in her social and political ideals that can be read from the comparison between *Open Skies* and *In Full Blue* and the titles in the “Fatherland” collection, gesture towards a strong tendency in Portuguese children’s literature towards the fictionalization of the drive to travel and know other cultures and the necessity to conciliate that with confinement to the native space. In the first four decades of the 20th century, which coincided with a period of decisive political changes in Portugal, some relevant authors wrote stories about travelling and adventure. Others were more interested in patriotic or nationalistic themes, as a response to the ideals of Salazar’s dictatorial government.

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³³ This is a list of the works by VCA read for the preparation of this article, not a list of all her works.

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